



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/women-take-charge-improve-nutrition-and-income>

## Women Take Charge to Improve Nutrition and Income



Alex Meckley

Peace Corps Volunteer Alex Meckley and Keineh Violet in Fundong, Cameroon.

With the help of Peace Corps Volunteer Alex Meckley of Tampa, Florida, women who farm in the Northwest Region of Cameroon are now strengthening the diets of their households and earning additional income.

As members of the Kom people, the women followed the group's long-standing agricultural traditions, cultivating hectares of corn so that it could then be milled into flour. To get nutrient-rich foodstuffs for their own tables, however, they were less likely to grow them than to buy them. But the price of these foodstuffs spikes in the dry season. For example, the average price of a medium-sized cabbage is twice as much as it is in the rainy season. Such prices, Meckley observed, made it hard for farming families to afford enough produce and led to nutritional imbalances in their diets. So, if the farmers were to grow vegetables, particularly in the dry season, they could improve both their nutrition and their income.

Though dry season gardening is work-intensive because the crops require constant watering, the socioeconomic payoff is great because it bolsters women's incomes, businesses, and social standing. With assistance from a Feed the Future partnership in the region, Meckley trained 12 farmers—including eight women—on organic household market gardening during the dry season and on business skills to keep track of and sell their products. Her training focused on leafy greens, cabbage and carrots, which many Kom people buy to prepare traditional meals, but few grow at home.

Over a 10-week period, the farmers learned how to make and use organic fertilizer and pesticides, manage a garden in the dry season, keep records, market their products and review the benefits of saving profits and planning for the future.

For the women training participants, who are entrenched in a culture where women do the majority of the physical labor on farms, the training was more than just an opportunity to diversify their household diets and increase their income. It was also an opportunity to earn status and respect in their community.

Meckley followed up the training by visiting the participants to see if they were adopting the practices and to help them troubleshoot pest problems and other challenges. In turn, each participant trained at least three other people on the

practices they had learned, passing on their knowledge and supporting their own trainees.

Keineh Violet, who runs a convenience store selling common household items and dried goods, had never gardened but had been farming corn, beans and coco yams on her family's farm. Since attending trainings and starting dry season gardening, Violet has put away money for times of need, like for her children's hospital visits. She has also been keeping a record book of her garden sales.

Violet has sold a total of 64,000 CFA francs (\$111) worth of cabbage and vegetables and also has enough to use at home. Now she has the money to stock the store regularly, join savings groups, save and take out loans. She is currently training four people and wants to continue growing her own garden during the next dry season.

"Since planting my vegetables, I have never had to buy," said Violet. "It has reduced my stress for going to the market, and I save the transport money. My family is eating more cabbage, carrots and vegetables for richer meals."